

Stress Busters: Practical Help for Life's Transitions

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What are your stresses and what are some practical ways of coping?

In my counseling/coaching practice many people struggle with their 'thoughts'. Philippians 4:8 says "Whatever is true, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable-if anything is excellent or praiseworthy-think about such things. When I get into negative thinking I try to ask myself : Is this thinking helpful to me? If no, what would be a true and praiseworthy way for me to look at or think about this situation?

Some time ago, I sideswiped another car with my van. Although the damage to his car was minimal, mine was more extensive. As I drove home from the dealer with a damage estimate of over \$500.00, I was thinking, "How stupid that was to hit that car and \$500.00! That's not how I want to spend my money!" I was reminded of Philippians 4:8 and thought about what was true and praiseworthy - "It's all God's money anyway and I can write the check, no one was injured, six months from now this will be a dim memory". In changing my 'thinking' my 'feelings' of frustration and anger subsided. In changing my 'thinking' my 'feelings' will follow - that's where my focus needs to be. According to Facts and Trends - October 96 - we talk to ourselves 1200 words per minute - it's called 'self talk' or 'thinking' - Is yours positive or negative? Helpful or not?

Regarding feelings: Some of us get stuck in thoughts, some of us get stuck in feelings. Now we're not to be ruled by our feelings but we are to identify them as they give us direction. Denying them leads to depression, anxiety, burnout. Feelings are always connected to our thoughts so as in my van experience although I was frustrated, I didn't stay there - I focused on my thinking and worked on changing it and as a result my feelings calmed.

Set realistic goals for yourself and be realistic in your expectations of others. A frantic pace can lead to depression by causing anxiety, worry and frustration. Learning to say 'no' is a skill we have to learn - sometimes even 'good' things aren't best for us. Evaluate your motive - am I doing this to please someone else or do I really want to do this?

Learn to nurture yourself. Think about your checkbook. If I continue to make withdrawals without making deposits, I'll start bouncing checks. So it is with us - I need to simultaneously make deposits because 'life' already makes numerous withdrawals on a daily basis.

This is not to become self centered but it is to become more balanced so that I can be more available emotionally and otherwise to those around me.

Be intentional about nurturing yourself. For the next three weeks list 50 ways you might do that (i.e. read a book, get a massage, take a walk, meet a friend for coffee).

Decide that you will build in (intentionally) 1-3 things off that list every day for you to do and see what happens.

Ask for support - this may be one of the hardest things we do for ourselves. We cannot do it all and do it perfectly and our 'pride' can get in the way of asking for support - i.e. family, trusted friends, accountability group. I'm an independent person but there was a time I felt overwhelmed and asked my friends for some help. It was not only a huge relief but it was clear that they were blessed by being asked. Often times, people want to help but may not know how.

Identify your stressors - what are they - if I can't change them can I change my perception/thoughts about them or my reaction to them?

What are my priorities? Are they in order? I challenge you to evaluate these areas in your life this week and attempt to make one change in each of them.

If I'm still not handling things, I may need to seek additional help.

*Look for future articles related to managing your stress.